loading said object supported by said plurality of support members onto a support surface of said stage, wherein the stage is movable two-dimensionally, and the stage has a hole portion in which the support surface is formed; and

withdrawing said plurality of support members from said hole portion to an other surface side of said object after loading said object onto the support surface of said stage.

2. (Amended) The method according to claim 1, further comprising:

moving relatively said object and said plurality of support members; and

moving said plurality of support members in respective predetermined directions within a moving plane perpendicular to a direction in which said object and said support members are relatively moved.

3. (Amended) The method according to claim 2, wherein said plurality of support members are withdrawn from the hole portion by relatively moving said object and said plurality of support members, after respectively moving said plurality of support members in the respective predetermined directions.

10. (Amended) The method according to claim 2, wherein

the relative movement of said plurality of support members and said stage is performed so as to contact said one surface of said object with the support surface of said stage; and

moving said plurality of support members thereafter in predetermined directions within the plane perpendicular to the direction in which said support members and said stage are relatively moved.

11. (Amended) The method according to claim 1, further comprising:

moving relatively said stage and said plurality of support members such that contact portions of said support members are located on said one surface side of said object supported on said stage;

moving said plurality of support members in respective predetermined directions within a plane perpendicular to a direction in which said stage and said plurality of support members are relatively moved; and

unloading said object from said stage by relatively moving said plurality of support members and said stage.

12. (Amended) The method according to claim 1, wherein the object includes a mask having a circuit pattern.

13. (Amended) The method according to claim 1, further comprising:

performing a relative position adjustment between said object and said stage in a two-dimensional plane parallel to a surface of said object by relatively moving said plurality of support members and said stage along the two-dimensional plane before loading said object onto said stage, while the stage is monitored by an interferometer system.

19. (Amended) The apparatus according to claim 29, further comprising:

a second driving mechanism which drives said plurality of support members in respective directions within a plane perpendicular to said first direction.

20. (Amended) The apparatus according to claim 19, wherein openings are formed in said first object, said plurality of support members being able to be inserted/withdrawn through said openings in said first direction.

25. (Amended) The apparatus according to claim 20, wherein said first object includes a mask and a frame member, a predetermined circuit pattern being formed on said mask, said frame member being securely fixed on said mask, and said openings are formed in said frame member.

27. (Amended) The apparatus according to claim 29, further comprising:

an elastic member arranged on a contact portion of said support member, said contact portion coming into contact with said object.

28. (Amended) The apparatus according to claim 29, further comprising:

a cylindrical cover arranged around a driving shaft of said first driving mechanism.

29. (Amended) An exposure apparatus for transcribing a pattern formed on a first object onto a second object with an optical system, comprising:

a stage which mounts said first object on a mounting surface, wherein the stage has a hole portion in which the mounting surface is formed, and the stage is movable in a two-dimensional plane; and

a transfer system which transports said first object to/from said stage, said transfer system including

a plurality of support members which supports said first object; and

a first driving mechanism which moves said plurality of support members in a first direction perpendicular to the two-dimensional plane between a first position and a second position, wherein the ends of the plurality of support members are positioned in the hole portion of the stage when said plurality of support members are moved to said second position by the first driving mechanism.

31. (Amended) The apparatus according to claim 30, further comprising:

an interferometer system which monitors said stage during movement between the transportation and exposure positions.

35. (Amended) The apparatus according to claim 29, wherein the mounting surface is formed on a bottom portion of the hole portion of said stage.

36. (Amended) A method of manufacturing an exposure apparatus for transcribing a pattern formed on a first object onto a second object with an optical system, comprising:

providing a first stage which mounts said first object on a mounting surface, wherein the first stage has a hole portion in which the mounting surface is formed, and the stage is movable in a two-dimensional plane;

providing a transfer apparatus which transports said first object to from said first stage, said transfer apparatus including:

a plurality of support members which supports said first object; and

a first driving mechanism which moves said plurality of support members in a first direction perpendicular to the two-dimensional plane between a first position and a second position, wherein the ends of the plurality of support members are positioned in the hole portion of the stage when said plurality of support members are moved to said second position by the first driving mechanism;

providing said optical system; and

providing a second stage which mounts said second object.

37. (Amended) The method according to claim 36, further comprising:

providing an interferometer system which manages a transportation position, an exposure position, and a position of said first stage during movement between the transportation and exposure positions, said first object being transported to/from said transfer apparatus at said transportation position, said pattern being transcribed onto said second object at said exposure position, and said first stage moving between said transportation position and said exposure position.

Please add new Claims 39-42 as follows:

39. (New) An exposure apparatus for transcribing a pattern formed on a first object onto a second object with an optical system, comprising:

a stage which holds said first object on a mounting surface, wherein the stage has a hole portion in which the mounting surface is formed, and the stage is movable in a two-dimensional plane; and

a transfer system which transports said first object to from the mounting surface formed in the hole portion of said stage.

40. (New) The exposure apparatus according to claim 39, wherein said transfer system has a mark detecting system which detects a mark formed on the first object before the first object is loaded on the stage.

41. (New) The exposure apparatus according to claim 40, further comprising a focus detecting system for the first object held on the mounting surface.

42. (New) The exposure apparatus according to claim 41, further comprising an interferometer system, the stage being monitored by the interferometer system.

IN THE ABSTRACT

Please amend the Abstract on page 63 to read as follows:

ABSTRACT

An elevator unit including three support members capable of vertically moving and rotating are arranged above a transportation position where an object is transferred by a transfer arm. When the object is transferred to the transportation position, the support members move downward to a position and rotate in a predetermined angle $\alpha°$. The support members slightly move upward to receive the object from the arm. When the arm withdraws, the support members move downward to a stage to place the object on the stage. The support members then rotate, in the predetermined angle $\alpha°$, in a direction opposite to the direction in which they rotated before, and then move upward to a position. This makes it possible to mount the object on a mount surface smoothly, without any problem, even if the mounted surface is located lower in level than the upper surface of the stage.